

Message Text

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ORIGIN NEA-10

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY JIDDA NIACT IMMEDIATE

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS:MASS, PFOR, SA, US

SUBJECT: SFRC LETTERS ON F-15

1. THE SECRETARY RECEIVED EVENING JANUARY 24 TWO LETTERS
FROM SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE MEMBERS ON THE
F-15 AS FOLLOWS.

2. QUOTE: AS YOU KNOW, THE STATE DEPARTMENT HAS STARTED
CONSULTING WITH THE CONGRESS ON THE PROPOSED SALE OF 60
F-15 AIRCRAFT TO SAUDI ARABIA. A NUMBER OF OUR
COLLEAGUES HAVE WRITTEN URGING YOU TO WITHHOLD THE SUB-
MISSION OF THE LETTER OF OFFER.

WITHOUT NECESSARILY JOINING IN EACH OF THEIR REASONS, WE
DO FEEL THAT UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES IT WOULD BE BEST IF
THE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, WHICH IS PREPARING A
MAJOR STUDY OF THE PROPOSED SALE, WERE NOT PUT UNDER THE
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DEADLINES WHICH THE LAW SPECIFIES, AND WHICH BEGIN
IMMEDIATELY UPON SUBMISSION OF THE LETTER OF OFFER.

WE HOPE VERY MUCH THAT YOU AND THE PRESIDENT WILL SEE THE
DESIRABILITY OF THIS POSITION AND THAT THE SUBMISSION OF
THE LETTER OF OFFER WILL BE WITHHELD ACCORDINGLY. UNQUOTE.
SIGNED: HOWARD BAKER, JAMES PEARSON, JACOB JAVITS.

3. QUOTE: AS YOU KNOW, THE STATE DEPARTMENT HAS STARTED CONSULTING WITH THE CONGRESS ON THE PROPOSED SALE OF 60 F-15 AIRCRAFT TO SAUDI ARABIA. WE HAVE GRAVE RESERVATIONS ABOUT THE ADVISABILITY OF SUPPLYING THE MOST ADVANCED FIGHTER BOMBER IN THE WORLD TO SAUDI ARABIA. THERE ARE SEVERAL REASONS WHY WE CONSIDER SUCH A SALE UNWISE.

SIXTY F-15S WOULD DESTABILIZE THE ARAB-ISRAELI BALANCE OF POWER. THE OPERATION OF SUCH AN AIRCRAFT BY THE SAUDI AIR FORCE WOULD SERIOUSLY ENLARGE THE THREAT OF AN AERIAL STRIKE AGAINST ISRAELI MILITARY AND CIVILIAN TARGETS. THE SAUDI AIRBASE AT TABUK IS ONLY 150 MILES FROM ISRAEL'S MAJOR SOUTHERN PORT OF EILAT.

WE HAVE NO DESIRE TO HARM OUR GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF SAUDI ARABIA AND WE APPRECIATE THE CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE THAT THEY HAVE PLAYED IN EFFORTS TO SECURE A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT. HOWEVER, WE CANNOT OVERLOOK THE POSSIBILITY THAT THESE AIRCRAFT MIGHT BE TRANSFERRED TO OTHER ARAB GOVERNMENTS IN THE EVENT NEW HOSTILITIES BREAK OUT. IT MUST BE REMEMBERED THAT SAUDI ARABIA HAS ALLOWED EGYPTIAN PILOTS TO TRAIN ON AMERICAN-SUPPLIED F-5E FIGHTER PLANES, DESPITE THE TERMS OF THE SALE.

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THE ABSORPTIVE CAPACITY OF THE SAUDI AIR FORCE IS NOT SUFFICIENTLY ADVANCED TO FULLY ASSIMILATE AS MANY AS 60 F-15S. YET, EVEN IF OPERATED AT ONLY 50 PERCENT EFFICIENCY THERE WOULD BE A QUANTUM JUMP IN THE SAUDI CAPABILITY TO LAUNCH AN ATTACK. THE REAL DEFENSE NEEDS OF SAUDI ARABIA CAN BE ADEQUATELY MET BY OTHER TYPES OF INTERCEPTORS. THE F-5 SYSTEM, WHICH WILL BE COMPLETED IN THE EARLY 1980'S, AND THE IMPROVED HAWK MISSILE FORCE WOULD FURNISH SAUDI ARABIA WITH A FULLY DEPENDABLE DEFENSE SHIELD.

MOREOVER, THE CONTEMPLATED SALE OF THE F-15S RUNS COUNTER TO THE PRESIDENT'S ARMS SALES POLICY AS ENUNCIATED IN PRM-12. THE TRANSFER OF THE F-15S WOULD IMPEL OTHER COUNTRIES IN THE PERSIAN GULF TO MATCH THE GREATLY ENLARGED SAUDI STRIKING POWER, THUS LEADING TO A DANGEROUS ESCALATION OF THE REGIONAL ARMS RACE.

THE UNCERTAIN STATUS OF THE SUSPENDED MIDDLE EAST NEGOTIATIONS REQUIRES THAT NO ACTION BE TAKEN THAT WOULD JEOPARDIZE A RESUMPTION OF THE TALKS. IN ADDITION, THE FOREIGN ASSISTANCE SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE SENATE FOREIGN

RELATIONS COMMITTEE IS PREPARING A MAJOR STUDY OF THE PROPOSED SALE. WE FIRMLY BELIEVE THAT THIS IS NOT THE TIME TO AGREE TO THE SALE OF SUCH POTENT AND SOPHISTICATED WEAPONS TO SAUDI ARABIA.

MR. SECRETARY, AT THE VERY LEAST, WE STRONGLY URGE YOU TO WITHHOLD THE SUBMISSION OF THE LETTER OF OFFER UNTIL SUCH TIME AS THE PRESENT UNCERTAINTY SURROUNDING THE PEACE TALKS HAS ENDED. UNQUOTE.

SIGNED: FRANK CHURCH, JOSEPH BIDEN, PAUL SARBANES, DICK CLARK, RICHARD STONE, CLAIBORNE PELL, CLIFFORD CASE. VANCE

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